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SUBJECT: BELIZE FM MEETS WITH NEW AMBASSADOR

¶1. AMB and DCM called on FM Wilfred Elrington on September 17, immediately in advance of AMB's presentation of credentials to the Governor General, Sir Colville Young. Ambassador Adalbert Tucker, Director for Foreign Trade and Alfonso Gahona, Office Director for the Americas were also present.

¶2. The FM commented that Belize and the U.S. have a continuing good relationship and that he was looking forward to working with the AMB on many issues of mutual interest.

¶3. Noting the AMB's engineering and manufacturing background, the FM said there was no real manufacturing in Belize. It was troublesome for him that although there is easy access to the European, Caribbean, and North American markets, Belize had little to offer these markets. He recognizes the need for development of productive capacity and suggested the AMB might have some ideas for areas of cooperation. Tucker, the Director for Trade, said Belize needs to mobilize its productive base over the next three years and that they were looking to take advantage of best practices of others in the region.

¶4. The FM said that Belize has not concentrated enough on developing its human capital. Very little money is spent on educating the majority of the population. He commented that prior to independence in 1981, Belizeans never felt that they really "owned" Belize, that they really had a stake with its development. Now that they are the masters of their own country they have to focus on developing their human capital in order to create wealth for themselves.

¶5. The FM mentioned his own and the Embassy's frustration at the GoB's inability to get convictions in the courts of those charged with human trafficking. He noted from his own experience as an attorney that the police (and the military) have received only minimal training and that police work did not always stand up in court. He expressed appreciation for the improvements in police professionalism to be expected from the Merida Initiative. He noted that over the years more money had been spent on equipment for the police, but there had been less attention paid to molding and developing people who can function in higher executive positions in the police department.

¶6. The FM said that Belize was the only Caribbean country without an ROTC program in the secondary schools. He was of the opinion that an ROTC-type program would attract a better quality of student to careers in the police and military.

¶7. The thread through the FM's conversation was the need for human development and education in many areas of endeavor in Belize. The AMB, using a computer metaphor, said that with hardware one needed software as well. The FM expressed his pleasure in welcoming the AMB and his wife to Belize and assured the AMB of his accessibility to discuss any issue.

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